

THE PROBLEM OF CONTINUUM AND DISCONTINUUM  
IN THE COSMOGONY OF SVACCHANDATANTRA XI, 1-9

The cosmology of *Svacchandatantra* is no doubt one of the most important in Indian Philosophy, first of all because this Tantra has a chief position among the so-called monistic *Āgamas*<sup>1</sup> and secondly because, having been commented upon by Kṣemarāja<sup>2</sup>, is related to the school of Pratyabhijñā Philosophy.

*Svacchandatantra*, as a whole, is a complex treatise on initiation (*dīkṣā*) and, as such, largely deals with ritualism and *yoga-dhyāna*. Thus the recitation of cosmological and cosmogonical accounts is part of the « initiatic trip » of the adept and, at the same time, constitutes the background of fundamental truths regarding Reality.

The cosmographical description of the universe is a sort of ascending scale representing the series of *bhuvanas*<sup>3</sup>: a theme of highly symbolic significance which is one of the sources of the VIII book of *Tantrāloka*, a section we have dealt with elsewhere and therefore we do not take it now into particular consideration.

The cosmogonic aspect, i.e. the *adhvasriṣṭi* (path of creation) is here examined in its philosophical meaning and viewed as a particular example of *dvaitādvaita* metaphysic, which is however reinterpreted, by Kṣemarāja, in a more systematic and coherent manner as *advaita* of *ābhāsavāda*.

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1. The *Svacchandatantra* is classified among the Advaita Tantras, in the group of Bhairava Tantra. See K. C. PANDEY, *Abhinavagupta, an Historical and Philosophical Study*, Varanasi, Chowkhamba, 1963, p. 141.

2. *The Svachchanda Tantram with the commentary by Kṣemarāja*, edited by Paṇḍit Madhusūdan Kaul Shāstrī, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, Bombay, 1921-35, voll. 6. All the references given in the present article are taken from this edition. The XI *paṭala* is in the sixth volume.

3. The series of *bhuvanas* is expounded in the tenth *paṭala* of the *Svacchandatantra* and is often quoted in the commentary of Jayaratha to *The Tantrāloka* of Abhinavagupta, eighth *āhnika*.

In the XI *paṭala* of *Svacchandatantra* creation is based upon the supreme God Śiva, who is *sūkṣma*, i.e. beyond the range of all perception<sup>4</sup>, and is efficient cause, *nimitta-kāraṇa* and omnipresent (*sarvaga*). Śiva creates the entire universe without desire, that means without any want or deficiency, and through his own *tejas*, or, in other words, out of the glow and ardor of his very nature: one would also translate, in terms of Western language, with the Greek Word *agape*, although this could appear a rather venturous assertion.

Creation is also a play (*līlā*) a mere sport of the Lord and starts with a movement within the sky, *vyoma*. Here *vyoma* is considered as *upādāna-kāraṇa*, material cause, which however needs to be stirred by God and is not, in this respect, totally independent.

This cosmogonical account reflects a rather old metaphysical view and may be related to classical *Upaniṣads*, or at least to the *Maitrāyaṇīya* where we find that ether, *nabhas*, has as its own essence the *param tejas*<sup>5</sup>, the supreme heat or ardor, which appears to be the first light and identical with the syllable *Om*<sup>6</sup>.

In the cosmogony of *Svacchandatantra* that we have taken into consideration, after the « movement » of *vyoma*, out of it comes *sūnya*, a term difficult to interpret in this particular context: but we may translate it provisionally with the traditional word *void*.

From *sūnya* derives *sparsa* and from *sparsa nāda*<sup>7</sup>, the first sound. Let us now stop for a while to consider the meaning of this peculiar cosmogony apart from Kṣemarāja explanation which we shall deal with later. Kṣemarāja's commentary in fact, having been composed several century after the text of *Svacchandatantra*, reflects an already systematised philosophy and cannot be taken as the only possible interpretation although, as we shall see, it furnishes one of the best solutions to the metaphysical problem relative to creation.

*Sūnya*, in this particular context, is not an attribute of Śiva, *simpliciter*, as it is in other *Āgamas* or *Upaniṣads*<sup>8</sup>, but an originated « vacuum », a sort of void in a twirl, so to say, which however is not a *nihil*. It is the vacuity which precedes creation through the sound

4. Yo' sau sūkṣmaḥ paro devaḥ / kāraṇam sarvagaḥ śivaḥ, *Svacchanda T.*, XI, 2.

5. See: *The Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad, a critical essay, with text, translation and commentary*, by J. A. B. VAN BUITENEN, Mouton, 'S-Gravenhage, 1962, p. 121 (7, 11).

6. See also: A. PADOUX, *Recherches sur la symbolique et l'énergie de la parole dans certains textes tantriques*, Paris, De Boccard, 1963, p. 38.

7. *Sūnyāt sparśa samudbhavaḥ / tasmān nādaḥ samutpannaḥ*, *Svacchanda T.*, XI, 5.

8. As for the *Upaniṣads*, *sūnya* is found in the *Maitrāyaṇīya*, II, 4; VI, 31; VII, 4. *Sūnya* equated with *Ananda* is found also in the *Nṛsimhottaratāpanīya-upaniṣad*, VI. In the *Āgamic Literature* it is often an attribute of Śiva, in the sense that God is devoid of limitations and not describable through human categories. But there are texts like the *Prapañcasāratāntra* in which *Bindu* is symbolised by a circle: the empty space within is called *sūnya*. See: J. G. WOODROFFE, *Creation as explained in the Tantra*, Calcutta, Silver Jubilee of the Chaitanya Library, 1915, p. 17.

(*nāda*): having *sparsā* as *medium*. *Sūnya*, therefore does not represent a gap, or a discontinuity between *vyoma* and *sparsā*, but only a void in which *sparsā* may find place. *Sūnya* is then a link, a *continuum* rather than a *discontinuum*, and it constitutes a step in the cosmogonical descending scale.

This *sūnya* cannot be compared to a *nihil*, as we have said, and this account of creation has nothing to do with the *creatio ex nihilo* of Western philosophical tradition, unless one would compare *sūnya* not with a speculative concept (as is the «*ex nihilo*» in Semitic and Christian metaphysics) but with an image similar to that of a *chaos* or a chasm, in the Greek acception of the term (*chasma*).

As far as *sparsā* is concerned, how can it be interpreted? It seems to me that it may be understood as the first articulation preceding a sound, and, in this particular case, the first original sound: *nāda*. *Sparsā* is a pre-resonance, in the musical sense, a pre-vocal articulation out of which at last the first phonic sound comes out.

*Nāda*, in its turn, is eightfold, namely: *ghoṣa*, *rāva*, *svana*, *śabda*, *sphoṭa*, *dhvani*, *jhāṅkāra* and *dhvaṅkrta*<sup>9</sup>. Beside these eight aspects there is a ninth which is called *mahāśabda*, penetrating everything and ever sounding<sup>10</sup>.

Then *Sadāśiva* appears as God endowed with qualities of knowledge and action (*dṛkkriyātmaka*); that means: God manifests himself as creative activity comparable to that of seeing and acting.

From *nāda*, as further step, derives *bindu*, having the splendour of ten million suns, articulated in a tenfold way<sup>11</sup>, and appearing in different colours<sup>12</sup>. *Bindu*, as is known from the whole of Agamic Literature, is nothing but the first energetic concretion of creation and here is the first appearance of it in the glorious light of ten million suns.

Let us now stop in order to summarise our brief cosmogonical account in the philosophical perspective that commands our analysis of the text in question.

a) The supreme God Śiva is the «revealed» starting point of our knowledge regarding creation: this is the first truth which, as we shall see, may be considered also a «truth of reason» and not only a «revealed truth».

b) God is *nimittakāraṇa*, perfect fullness and therefore able to create as efficient cause, i.e. without any change in him.

9. As for the meaning of these terms, see below note 30.

10. *Navamas tu mahāśabdaḥ / sarveṣāṃ vyāpakāḥ smṛtaḥ // nadaty asau sadā...*, XI, 7. *Nadād binduḥ samutpannaḥ / Sūryakoṭisamaprabhaḥ / sa caiva deśadhā jñeyo / daśatattvaphalapradaḥ // daśadhā varṇarūpeṇa / daśadaivatasaṃyutaḥ /*, XI, 9-10.

11. See below, note 31.

12. The colours are given in the commentary as a quotation which sounds: *sitaṃ raktaṃ ca pītaṃ ca kṛṣṇaṃ harita pīṅgalam / nīlam vicitravarṇaṃ tu sphaṭikābham manoramam*, *Svacchanda T.*, vol. VI, p. 11.

- c) The « medium » of his creative action is his own *tejas*.
- d) The instrument is *vyoma* as *upādānakāraṇa*.
- e) The purpose is mere *līlā*.
- f) The sequence of the other cosmogonical steps: *śūnya*, *sparsa*, *nāda* and *bindu* are less important for the philosophical point of view we have chosen.

This Tantric cosmogony has clearly a descriptive character without any rational claim as it happens in all « revealed » religious texts. But the commentary of a philosopher like Kṣemarāja draws out whatever is rationally or metaphysically relevant in the above mentioned account of creation. The commentator explains in fact that the cause of the universe is the absolute Consciousness, the supreme Intelligence, *cit*, which is the source of knowing subject, object and means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*)<sup>13</sup>. Consciousness here is understood not as revealed *datum*, but as a truth that is self evident and no means of proof can demonstrate. Why? Because Consciousness, or Intelligence — the two terms being one and the same in meaning — is the source of any proof and therefore is *previous* to any possible demonstration. In other words, it is an immediate datum. This can be said, of course, of individual consciousness<sup>14</sup> and not of universal Consciousness which we cannot experience in our contingent world. But here comes out a principle—which is implied in Pratyabhijñā philosophy— that we may call a principle of *continuity*. Such a principle does not allow for either an interruption or any dissolution in consciousness, for without consciousness there is no world, there is neither subject nor object. This principle was also known to Buddhist Philosophy which presented it in terms of a *series* and not as self-subsisting unity. But Kṣemarāja, following the view of the Pratyabhijñā school, asserts, against the Buddhist, the permanence of the universal Consciousness, for a series of cognitions does not explain itself either as change (of different objects of knowledge) or as continuity. In fact it is easy to note that in a doctrine of universal momentariness there can be, and there must be a stop or a series of breaks<sup>15</sup>. This is a theory which was already refuted by the Vedānta and then again by the great śaiva philosopher Utpaladeva<sup>16</sup>.

13. *Cidānandaghanah, paraḥ sūkṣma ityantahkaraṇasyāpi agocaraḥ* (op. cit., vol. VI, p. 2). Pure Consciousness is very subtle, which means beyond the range of *antahkaraṇa* the instrument of human knowledge. As far as *pramāṇa* is concerned Kṣemarāja says: *Svaparakāśasya aśya siddhau na varākam pramāṇam upayuktam prayuta etadāyattā pramāṇādivastusiddhiḥ* (ibid.), p. 3.

14. See also *Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-kārikā*, 2 and *Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-vimarśinī*, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, n. XXII, Bombay, 1918, pp. 29-34. As for this problem, cfr. R. K. KAW, *The Doctrine of Recognition*, Hoshiarpur, Vishveshvaranand Institute, 1967, p. 110 and p. 163.

15. Cfr. E. FRAUWALLNER, *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 3 Auf. 1969, pp. 96-115; and also: *Id.*, *Aus der Philosophie der Śivaitischen Systeme*, Berlin Akademie Verlag, 1962, as far as Utpaladeva is concerned.

16. Cfr. also R. K. KAW, *The doctrine of Recognition* (op. cit.), chapter XI.

Once established the existence of the universal Consciousness which is called by Kṣemarāja, according to Vedānta Tradition, *cidānanda*, (because the fullness of Intelligence must be also fullness of Beatitude) how can we call it a « cause »? If the absolute and first Being is Intelligence, why should also be active? And activity does not imply a change in the acting subject? If an act of knowledge may involve a sort of change in the knowing subject, at least as far as contents of knowledge are concerned, in universal Consciousness there cannot be any modification, first of all because everything is *omnipresent* in it and secondly because the activity of Intelligence, as such, presupposes a permanent and immovable point of reference which is the absolute subject<sup>17</sup>.

In our text Kṣemarāja tells us that God, who is *cidānandaghana*, acts in a complete freedom, through the only « instrument » of his own *śakti* and makes objects appearing on his own screen (*svabhittau sarvaṃ ābhāsayaṭi*). Thus everything is « created » by way of *ābhāsavāda*. That means: everything is a manifestation, a *phainōmenon*, to put it in Greek words, within the universal Consciousness, for the « screen » (*bhitti*) is nothing but Consciousness itself. And whatever appears is not separate from God, for God is omnipresent and superintends his « creation »<sup>18</sup>.

God, as *svatantra* is able to bring about the universe without any extraneous cause, i.e. without an *upādānakāraṇa*, his own *śakti* being not separate from him. Dualism is thus overcome within the framework of *advaita metaphysics*, of *ābhāsavāda*: a theory which eludes the ambiguities of Śankara's school of thought and the so called idealism of *vivartavāda*<sup>19</sup>. If continuity between God and creation is established overcoming the *upādānakāraṇa* and avoiding the analogy of the potmaker<sup>20</sup> who works out a pre-existing matter, *vivartavāda* is also avoided, for *ābhāsavāda* is a *real* manifestation: and if change and becoming in the universe is real, this does not affect God because there is no alteration in *Him*.

But why should God create at all? There is, for creation, no deed nor a purpose except liberty expressed by the concept of *svātantrya*, or, as synonym of *līlā*, *svatantra-kṛīḍā*, free play. God is of the essence of his own free will and pure intelligence (*svaccha-svacchandacinmātramūrti*) and the world in its variety appears as a city reflected in a mirror<sup>21</sup>.

17. This theory is common with the Vedānta and is the main argument against those who deny, like the Buddhists, a permanent universal Self.

18. *yacca tad ābhāsayaṭi, na tat vyatiriktam... athāca tadgacchati ābhāsayaṭi adhiṭṭhatai ca...* (*Svacchanda T.*), op. cit., vol. VI, p. 3.

19. As for *Vivarta* see: P. HACKER, *Vivarta, Studien zur Geschichte der illusionistischen Kosmologie und Erkenntnistheorie der Inder*, Wiesbaden, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse, 1953, n. 5.

20. ... *Nāpi upādānādyapekṣakāryajanakatvena kumbhakārādi-sādhareṇa rūpeṇa yathā anyeṣāṃ adavaita-upadeśa-yogyanām-uktaḥ* (*ibid.*), pp. 34.

21. ... *jagat darpaṇa-nagaravad-anatiriktam api atiriktam iva ābhāsayaṭi* (*ibid.*), p. 5.

Thus *svātantryavāda* goes along with *ābhāsavāda* and it is due to the sovereignty of the Lord's will that effect evolves from a single first cause.

The term *vyoma* is explained by Kṣemarāja as *unmanā*, the supreme category identified with Śiva but having the power of covering his essence<sup>22</sup>.

Beside *unmanā*, Kṣemarāja mentions also *vyāpinī-śakti* and *samanā-śakti* the latter being the manifested object, and the first penetrating power which pervades the whole series of *tattvas*<sup>23</sup>.

This threefold character of *vyoma*, according to Kṣemarāja, obeys to what we have called the principle of continuity and gives account of differentiation without the need of any extraneous help; moreover the three concepts of *unmanā*, *samanā*, *vyāpinī* do not belong simply to the descriptive sphere, but express the transition, so to speak, from the absolute and pure Intelligence to the creative power gradually articulating itself in a real possibility of manifestation.

*Unmanā* is *paravimarśamayī*, supreme self-consciousness and pure I (*ahamtā-ekarasā*) and appears through *samanā* the first cause of differentiation and consequently of the possibility of discursive knowledge<sup>24</sup>, whereas *vyāpinī* determines the first movement, so to say, of objective manifestation, as *idantā* « or consciousness of this »<sup>25</sup>.

Even the discontinuity represented by being and non being (*bhavā-bhava*) in temporal succession has to be « filled up » by the *śakti* of the Lord. In fact Kṣemarāja quotes the *Pratyabhijñā-kārikā* 2, 1, 5 regarding multiplicity and variety in space and time<sup>26</sup>.

As far as *śūnya* is concerned, it is nothing but the state of quiet belonging to the sphere of *vyāpinī* and rising out of the *samanā* aspect of *vyoma*. And *sparsā*, coming out of *śūnya*, is the *śaktitattva* assuming the form of a sleeping snake: that means the cosmic energy in the subtle state in the threefold power of will, knowledge and action<sup>27</sup>.

*Śūnya*, therefore, has a meaning strictly connected with the divine power of manifestation and may thus be related not to void in the spatial sense, but to the *vyāpinī* energy penetrating the whole cosmos.

22. ... *vyoma unmanāvaraṇam svasvarūpam eva samkṣobhya*: « *atrārūḍhastukurute śivāḥ paramakāraṇam* » (*ibid.*). The quoted verse is from paṭala X, 1258 of *Svacchanda T.*

23. *vyāpinīśakti sadāśivādi bhāvābhāvātmake-śvaśaktibhittibhūta samanāśakti-bhūmikām āśritya samanātmaka śvaśakti bhūttau śvaśaktiā eva parameśvareṇa jagat bhāsyate* (*ibid.*).

24. ... *sadāśiva-anāśritapadātmaka-sarvabhāvābhāsa-sūtraṇabhitti-kalpasamanā-rūpatayā sphurati* (*ibid.*), p. 6.

25. ... *idantābhāsa-ullāsa-bhitti-bhūtatva-avabhāsanena ucchalad iva* (*ibid.*).

26. *mūrti-vaicitryato deśakramam ābhāsayaty asau kriyā-vaicitrya-nirbhāsāt kālakramam api īśvaraḥ*

27. *pratipāditarūpa-prasuptabhujaḡākāra-śaktitattvātmā sparsaḥ* (*ibid.*), p. 7.

In this respect one could also remember what is written in *Svacchandatantra* IV, 288-294 where is described the spiritual ascent of the yogin thorough the different kinds of « void »: the last three of which are called precisely *vyāpinī*, *samanā* and *unmanā*<sup>28</sup>. Here the mystical experience of the yogin is signified by the rise to the most elevated realms of realisation which culminate in the supreme *śūnya* devoid of manifestation<sup>29</sup>.

This correspondence between a descriptive cosmology and a mystical portion of *Svacchandatantra* shows the ontological continuity of the different degrees of reality and the parallel gradual stages of realisation. The above mentioned mystical section expresses a solidarity between the Tantric text and the commentary of Kṣemarāja both in the IV and in the XI *paṭalas*.

Such a continuity in creation and yogic experience allows the realised person to be one with the Supreme and at the same time one with creation and to pass from the inexpressible to what is expressed, from silence to sound (*nāda*) and from it to all the articulations of the manifested « voice » as have been handed down by the *guruparamparā*: i.e. the ten kinds of sound which symbolise, somehow, the archetypes of earthly sounds: from the rustling of fire, the increasing note of a gong, the whispering of a shower or the humming of bees, to the human voice uttering words, or the tone of musical instruments resounding in the air, and the ringing of a bell<sup>30</sup>. All these are only examples taken to convey the idea of the several respective properties of *ghoṣa*, *rāva*, *svana*, *śabda* etc. which are, in themselves, only analogically describable, as we say in Western philosophical language.

If such different sounds may be called modifications of *nāda* under the supremacy of *mahāśabda* — the first original sound penetrating everything or abiding in everything — it is because the first seed of creation has to produce its effects. But *nāda*, as cause, is of the nature of *vimarśa*, the selfconsciousness of reality which is, at the same time, the power of bringing about the emergence of the universe and therefore is the very essence of being. *Nāda* corresponds then to *Sadāśiva* as first manifestation of God.

The first sound, possessed with consciousness is at the same time an extension and a condensation of the Highest Consciousness. There is no act or manifestation in the cosmogonical procession which is devoid of consciousness and the first sound as well as *bindu*, deriving from *nāda*, are, in essence, of the same nature as Śiva. The fact that *bindu* shines

28. *śūnyatrayam calam hyetat / tadadho madhya ūrdhvataḥ // caturtham vyapinīśūnyam / samanāyām ca pañcamam / unmanāyām tathā ṣaṣṭam* (*Svacchanda T.*, IV, 289-90).

29. *tatśūnyam tu param sūkṣmam / sarvāvasthā vivarjitam* (*ibid.*), IV, 291.

30. These are the similes used to convey the meaning of the words *ghoṣa*, *rāva*, *svana*, *śabda*, *sphoṭa*, *dhvani*, *jhāṅkāra* and *dhvaṅkṛta*.



with the splendour of ten million suns indicates the presence of the light of the supreme Intelligence.

*Bindu* has also a variety of colours which signify the variety of creation and the tenfold subdivision or multivalence of its light: since *kriyā-icchā* and *jñāna-śakti* are each threefold, they constitute nine forms, as Kṣemarāja explains, and, along with their very essence which is the Ātman, make a set of ten<sup>31</sup>. This sort of exegesis, although it may seem artificial, not only is on the line of Agamic literature but underlines the connection between the different phases of creation and the yogin in meditation; for, again, the knowledge of these aspects of *bindu* and the symbolic colours and the fivefold manifestation of Śiva and the *kalā*: *nivṛtti*, *pratiṣṭhā*, *vidyā*, *sānti*<sup>32</sup> — gives fruits of merit and thus helps to recover full unity with the highest portion of creation.

Quite interesting also, in this connection, the relation given by Kṣemarāja, between the letters of the Sanskrit Alphabet and the tenfold *bindu*<sup>33</sup>. In other terms, *bindu* is not only light but is also related to the letters from which one can formulate a language. Here the fruit or « benefit » of such a knowledge is the possibility of speaking and, of course, of thinking in an articulate manner. To know the highest degrees of creation means to have the clue of the thought positively expressed in language. The subdivision of the letter (*varṇa*) of the Alphabet, in this page of Kṣemarāja's commentary, has a different value from that of symbols of the emanation of the universe in other Tantric Texts<sup>34</sup>.

The association between sound and light, between unity and multiplicity links together archetypical letters and synthetic language.

The speculative use of the philosophy of language as given in the Pratyabhijñā-system allows us to give the most positive evaluation of the intermediary function of language between the unmanifested transcendent world and the field of manifestation. There is no possible visible manifestation without a verbal expression, in this world. Whatever is visible and audible or tangible is also expressible. Language is not a fiction or an artificial construction — and this is against the Buddhist theory of *discontinuum* — but essentially a synthetic way of expressing reality.

Although Kṣemarāja, in his brief commentary to the above mentioned section of *Svacchandatantra* does not explain the relationship between thought and speech, it is clear from the whole of his philosophy that language, as such, is the abode of truth, and is a created

31. *Svacchanda T.*, vol. VI, p. 11.

32. The symbol of each and every colour is not given in the commentary, nor is given their relation to the *kalā*.

33. *Bindu* is *visarga* (symbolising the emanation of the universe) and the other letters, subdivided in ten groups, constitute the whole of speech: *etadvarṇa-daśaka-abhivṛtyatvāt sarvavāñmayarūpam...* (*ibid.*), p. 12.

34. As for this, see A. PADOUX, *op. cit.*



instrument for expressing it. The divine thought is perfect truth: and above the realm of *māyā* in the series of the thirty-six tattvas of Śaivism, no delusion is possible.

The adept called to initiation will rise, through the *dīkṣā* and therefore by the grace of God, above the condition in which delusion, and untruth (in the verbally expressed form) is possible, and during the ceremony will learn how language was created, how divine it is and how truthful in its essence, for it is intrinsically bound to the very source of truth. Language, being not a mere human convention, is able to express adequately the eternal truth: this is the necessary corollary of this cosmogony of *Svacchandatantra* and the link of *continuity* between superhuman or divine language and human language, considering that the latter needs to be reconnected to the former through the purification of the mind of the initiated<sup>35</sup>.

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35. As far as initiation is concerned see: H. BRUNNER-LACHAUX, *Somasambhupaddhati*, voll. 3, Pondichery, Institut français d'Indologie, 1963-77, and also: S. GUPTA, D. J. HOENS and T. GOUDRIAAN, *Hindu Tantrism*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1979.